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Cover

A
CONVERSATION,

*Supposed to have passed since the beginning of
the Month of December 1792, between*

**THOMAS PAINE, MARAT, PETION,
DUMOURIER, and ROLAND ;**

*In which the Views of France upon this Coun-
try are somewhat developed.*

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A

CONVERSATION, &c.

THOMAS PAINE, MARAT, PETION, DUMOURIER,
and ROLAND.

Marat.

WELL, Tom, how are your last dispatches—
How do we go on in England?

Paine. Bravely—all before the wind. But, my
Friends, we want more Cash.

Petion. Why, Tom, the J unto here begin to
be dissatisfied, and to say they must have an ac-
count of the sums already advanced for that ser-
vice. They say, the war with Prussia and the
Empire has comparatively scarce cost more than
has been paid in order to prepare the English
People for our purpose. I doubt they will not
go much farther.

Paine. I hope they have not any suspicions of
my honour. You all know, when we first formed
the Plan, that I told you and them there was a
damned stubborn sense and honesty about the
lower orders of that country, which, notwith-
standing the depth and excellence of my various
schemes and contrivances, it would be impracti-
cable to mislead but slowly, if we could gain our

B

point at all. The charges of gathering materials, printing, (especially bold and seditious matter) of distributing, and keeping alive the whole system, are enormous! The mere cost of intelligence, and conveying orders over England, Scotland, and Ireland, would astonish you all. We often dare not trust to the Post——But have confidence——Depend upon my word——The thing will be accomplished.

Marat. *Par Dieu*, if my advice on this business had been followed, and a sufficient number of my *Marseillois* sent over, we should have finished the work before this time. I hate slow instruments—News-papers (though I was forced at first to take up that line myself), Hand-bills, Debating Societies, Print-shops, writing upon walls, talking of Reform, Titles, Placemen, and so forth.——Blood! Blood! is the way.——

Get together, bankrupts, tradesmen who have no credit, and cannot stand, discarded workmen, fellows who have lost all character and honest means of livelihood, house-breakers, pickpockets, and rogues of every description, a great number of poor idle mischievous boys, abandoned prostitutes; break open the prisons, let debtors and criminals loose, give plenty of liquor, disperse among the mob my gangs, with their pikes, axes, and halberts, who have been trained, and are proved men; head and lead properly; strike first at some great Distiller's, or Wine-merchant's house, that the people may get the more intoxicated, and at some rich Banker's, or Jeweller's, that they may early taste the sweets of the spoil; massacre, burn, lantern, spare neither men, women, nor children——On my life, we

shall soon breed confusion enough for our friend Dumourier to act.

Dumourier. Citizens and Associates, Marat talks manfully. Daring measures command success. The troops are ready, and full of ardor; they pant to sack London!—Give us but footing on English ground, and with my Artillery I'll show the proud and insolent Islanders what Frenchmen can do—I'll teach them——

Paine. By god, gentlemen, if you hurry, you will mar all. I am well acquainted with the character of my late countrymen, and though I detest and have long been resolved to ruin them, yet I must own they are noble-minded, bold as lions, humane, and generous. They will not strike except openly and fairly. You may as easily master the Element that surrounds them as themselves by force. If any of your Marseillois scenes were to be acted in England, the best and most staunch of our friends would desert us. An Englishman abhors barbarity. He would rather die than lift his hand against the innocent or the defenceless. Besides, my good friends, Dumourier and Marat, you forget the British Fleet. The Tars love Old England, and are unfortunately loyal to the back-bone: And now that we are met in strict confidence, to disguise nothing, and are sure of secrecy, I must confess it with sorrow, so are the Soldiery. I got thousands and thousands of that precious composition, "The Soldier's and Sailor's Friend," dispersed among the Navy, the Merchant-ships, and the Army. I hired as many fellows as I could procure to undertake the job, to enter and enlist

in both services. I bought a few others already in them, who were ready to sell themselves for any work. I had these fellows tutored as to the language they were to hold, and how to conduct themselves with proper art and cunning. But after all my pains and expence, I made no way here. Whenever my agents tried to push our plot, and to tamper with the Sailors or Soldiers, as was settled, they generally began to damn and swear ; they loved their Officers, King and Country, and that they would be blown to pieces, before they would forsake their duty, or turn tail to a Frenchman. My people employed in this line ran great risks, and I was obliged to pay them very high.

And here, my friends, upon the same principle of implicit confidence and profound secrecy, I must also own, there is one other, and that a most extensive and valuable body of men, that we have not yet been able to corrupt, though I may safely assert, no efforts on my part, and on that of those who act with us on the other side of the water, have been wanting, I mean the Peasantry of England. Albeit common men, they have wonderful good plain sense and discernment, and their understanding cannot easily be deceived.

The low price of labour ; the length of time since wages in the different Counties have been raised ; the dearness of all the necessaries of life ; the load of taxes ; the hardship of rearing numerous families ; the poor man's sufferings ; the meaning of sinecure places ; these, and various other topics of like kind have been used and repeated over and over again, by choice emissaries, at Fairs, Horse-races, Bull-baitings, Cricket-matches, in Church-yards after Divine Worship,

in Country Papers, and above all, through those matchless nurseries for mischief, Public Houses ; as also by divers other methods we are in the habit of practising ; but they never could obtain the desired and expected effect. The labouring Peasants, according to the reports from time to time made me, think and speak to this purport : —that although they feel considerable difficulty in supporting themselves and Families by their daily earnings, yet they are persuaded that on the whole, they are better off than the labouring poor of other Countries, and that Tumult and the Sword at all events, is not the way to mend their situation. They are confident that when their pressures are stated in a becoming manner to their employers, or wealthy neighbours they will be listened to—they see too well what is the lot of poor Country Folks in France. They love their wives and children, and should think it a shame to desert and leave them to starve, whilst themselves are cutting throats, and living on the Plunder of other Countries. Does that raise corn (they cry) make wages better, bread cheap, or lower the price of butcher's meat ? Then they say, with all the fine talk of *equality*, the French common people, they hear, have gained nothing but famine and misery ! They are not such fools neither, as to believe all can be Masters. Egad, they wish Master Paine would only find out the way to make their sheep, lambs, and bullocks fatten *equally* every year, and their crops turn out *equally* good. They doubt some mischief is meant from France as heretofore. Besides, they believe in God, and the Christian Religion, and do not wish to bring up their children Atheists. Nor do they like the abolition of bap-

tism and of marriage in Church by a Parson. Though times are hard enough, yet they are free, and as much King in their Cottages as His Majesty is in his Palace. They are true Englishmen, as their fathers were before them ; love the Constitution, and respect the Laws, because they are alike good for the great and the small. And they often add, for I must keep back nothing, however disagreeable the mention may be, that they shall never have any great opinion of a writer, who, if he is not belied, does not pay his debts here, but runs off to become a great man at Paris. I do not, however, altogether despair of this class ; Tithes, Plurality of Livings, Right to all of voting for Parliament-men, and immediate Reform of the House of Commons, are topics on which I still place great reliance in regard of the Country ; and have given orders to push them with might and main.

And here, Associates, permit me to indulge a little, and touch upon the perfection and triumph of my plan ; namely, Cities and populous Towns, particularly manufacturing ones in the North—There is my masterpiece ! and, I think I may affirm without boasting, that we have finely duped most of them, and got fast hold of the Manufacturers—That set of men like to read and debate. The List of Societies under the influence of our Agents, would yield you pleasant astonishment. The returns of every Mail shew their rapid increase. We have the cleverest fellows in the world in this employ ; and cheap, for there is no risk as with the Soldiers and Sailors. I have made the Manufacturers so restless and eager after change, that they can hardly sleep in their beds, or bear to stay their day's work out, thus impatient are they to run to their

Clubs. They earn so much, many of them, that they can afford to be idle, and to frequent the Meetings two or three days in the week, besides the evenings: and this mis-spending of time and money has another good effect, it serves to bring their families to want, and thereby increase discontent. Then again, when at home, their wives and children are never thought of or cared for. Reading my Books, and reasoning upon Government, wholly possess their minds——every other concern is neglected. We keep them in a perpetual fever. Indeed, so full are they of Democratic Principles, the Rights of Man, Universal Equality, freedom from all controul, and hatred to Kings, and so ripe for insurrection and mischief, that we once, in order to save expence, proposed drawing off the regular Agents, stationed to watch over, and keep up the right spirit. We found, however, that was not to be ventured upon from the following circumstance: Now and then some hard-headed blunt fellows get among them who smell a Plot, and smother the falsity of my arguments, or suspect the design of them, and begin talking in this fashion:——Do not we live by Trade and quiet? Did not our Town grow by it; and many of our present Masters, from sweeping out warehouses and other low beginnings, get to be rich men, so as to keep above a hundred hands, and all by Industry? What, in God's name, can we gain by Disturbances and Tumult? Who will in such times set up great Manufactories, employ our young children, enable us, if we are careful, to save, and, if lucky, to set up by-and-bye for ourselves? How will the Cloth, Cotton, and Steel or Hard-ware Manufactories thrive? Halberts and musquets will not make the looms go, or enable a bricklayer's-labourer,

or a carpenter's man, if they are sober and saving, to get to be builders ; or cobblers' apprentices to be shoemakers ? Then (for here also I must not suppress) has not this Mr. Paine, (who writes so learnedly, and hires persons to throw Pamphlets and Hand-bills in at our doors and windows, and put them slyly into our hands in the streets, and tells us all men are alike, and have a right to be equal) gone off from Law ? Is he not an Enemy to Old England and become a Frenchman ? We do not much trust in this bankrupt run-away frenchified man ! We do not well comprehend what Aristocrat means ; but, we think, King, Lords, and Commons, may serve our turn as they did those who went before us—we had rather stick to them. We remember too well the Riots about twelve years back. We wish to have the little we can lay by, when placed in the Bank or lent to honest capable neighbours, safe and sure ; and not to see the fruits of our sweat and labour ravaged, and our wives and daughters ill-treated. — I say, when any of this description of fellows hold such indecent and dangerous language, some of our able ones get up, abuse Loyalty, talk loudly of the Majesty of the People, the inherent Rights of Man, Pensions, Taxations, Bishops, Excise, Placemen, Nobility, badness of the times, expence of Law to poor men, quote passages from my Publications, propose a bumper to the Tree of Liberty, and if they observe it to be necessary, strike up that blessed tune, *Ca ira* ; upon which, the rest in the secret immediately join Chorus. This bold and judicious introduction of settled topics and cant phrases, bears down and silences their opponents, who are generally good-humoured, inoffensive, respectable and thriving Artists, Mechanics, and labouring men. Thus dust is

thrown in the eyes of the Clubs, and the true French spirit kept up. Indeed, there is nothing we are more anxious about than to hinder this important Class of the Community from being undeceived.

To be sure, the rapid growth of the Trade, Commerce, Population, and Wealth of Great Britain, is much against us. but we leave no stone unturned to counteract the effects of her present unparalleled prosperity; to misrepresent and to excite murmur and dissatisfaction. And on this occasion let me have the pleasure to acquaint you of a most admirable Expedient, lately hit off and practised:— This consists in framing an artful seasonable Lie, and propagating the same, to give the people the turn of mind we want, and stimulate them to do the act asserted to have happened.

Of this nature was the report of the first pair of horses being taken out of a Nobleman's carriage, who was travelling with four through a manufacturing place in the North of England—of Insurrections in Ireland—of certain Regiments refusing to obey command, and being disaffected; though the last was somewhat hazardous, as it wounded the honour of a Soldier, offended him, and had, there is reason to fear, a contrary effect to what was meant. The Disturbances at Shields and other Coal Ports we strove to foment, in order to prevent London and different parts of England from being supplied with that Article cheap: Though on that occasion a great opportunity was allowed to slip, owing to the unexampled gallantry and generosity of those British Tars, for when the Vessel sent to quell the riots was in danger and nearly lost, the very fellows concerned in them, instead of rejoicing and letting her go down, one and all, hand and heart, flew

to her assistance, and saved her. Untoward circumstances of this kind, however, only animate and spur me on the more.—Besides, Citizens, I am writing again, and if I can depend upon my own judgment, it will be the first of my performances the most fit to create Ferment, and light up Sedition, set Britain in an uproar, and shake Loyalty to the centre! I will just give you the outline---

Marat. For God's sake no more writing or talking, Mr. Paine. You forget, we shall fall to pieces at home if the completion of our English scheme is postponed. You cannot deny, that from time to time you have named the day when the Tree of Liberty was to be planted in English soil, and our friends by thousands to flock to it, as the Signal of Revolt and Levelling—When, to use your own expression, the Lion, that never could be subdued by foreign force, would be cajoled and muzzled at home—Ah! what a glorious day that will be for France,---to see the proud and before untamed Britons, whom we have fought for ages, and who have always been powerful enough to resist us, march in solemn procession, and bow down before the Banners of our Republic, whilst *Ca ira* is playing by the Bands of the Regiments of France.

I fancy I see Dumourier publishing in England the language agreed to be held wherever he should carry the glory of the French arms, and which has so cleverly caught many of the Germans and Brabanters (before prepared to receive it by our Emissaries),---in State at London issuing his Edicts, and when all our schemes have ripened, I fancy, with rapture, those sturdy Islanders subdued and tributary to France; I repeat it, What a triumph for France and for Frenchmen! and

what a rich day for our Junto, according to the stipulations. But to return, I will speak out, Mr. Paine, as I always do—these repeated failures of your promise create disgust and doubt on this side of the water.

Petion. Temper, my Friends--- We run too fast, and divide the spoils before we have won the game. We met here to consult upon the present state of events, and to discuss sundry momentous matters. I was charged by our Associates in the first instance, as I expressed at the commencement of this Conversation, to inform Mr. Paine, that before any further Credit is given him upon England, they insist he shall render in a statement of his Accounts up to the last three hundred thousand livres entrusted to his management---Many of them, soured at delay, are become vehement and outrageous. They suggest, that a fair division of the sums, lodged for the object of instilling our doctrines among the English, Scotch, and Irish, would have been a fortune to each individual Member, and surer play; and that the enterprise is too speculative-----Indeed, Mr. Paine, the thing proposed must be done.

Paine. I again look you all, as I would them, full in the face, and ask if any man of you doubts my Honour or Abilities---Am I not tried?---Was I not true to America, influenced by my hatred to Great Britain?—Did I not keep my word with her?---Is she not a Republic?---Have not my Books gone through innumerable editions, and fascinated Mankind?---Am I not the most popular man upon the Globe?-----Have I not brought all Governments under my feet? Without being vain-glorious I may assert, Revolutions hang upon every page I write. Have I time for

drawing out accounts? Friends, Friends, our Band do not repose confidence enough in me!---- Their last mistrust, and the detestable plan of keeping me short of Money, will mar the whole undertaking. That error forced me to run in debt and quit England, where I was so busy, and my presence so highly useful. Did I not nearly lose my life the last trip at Dover? Though no man dares to doubt of my courage, I once on that occasion (so imminent was the peril) would almost have relinquished my dignities as a Member of the Convention, and preferred being again a Stay-maker at Sandwich, or an Excise-Officer at Lewes. Besides, the affair of the debts and flight did inconceivable harm to our Cause, for the English, as you must have collected from what I have already said, do not think favourably of a man who will not, or can not pay his just debts, and goes off to escape a prison. They have, farther, a rooted notion, which would be deemed weak and vulgar in this Country, that let an Author write as ably as he may, or profess what he pleases, if he acts a bad or dishonest part in life, he cannot mean well, or be sound at bottom. By god, if I am suspected, or forced to reckon like a common hireling, I'll throw it up. Have any of you been compelled to account? Beware of the precedent----We must support each other.---- We all mean the same.

Dumourier. My dear Paine, be pacified; do not let us quarrel, and check our career, when we have advanced so far. Yet I feel for a great man acting a dignified patriotic part, who is thus thwarted, and called upon to cast up, draw out, and balance like a little dealer: I myself have not been exempt from indignities of a similar

kind——The Convention have dared to doubt of the conduct of a man, whom I appointed Contractor-General for the Army under my command, and for whom I made myself responsible. In reward of all my Toils, Dangers, Victories, Triumphs, they have thought fit to displace this faithful servant, merely upon a false and scandalous rumour, that the Troops had bad provisions and short allowance, and that by a secret engagement the profits of the Contract were divided.——Courage of a Soldier! I will not be thus treated. The Army idolize me, and, *ventre bleu*, Sword in hand——

Marat. My Marseillois are ready, say the word, Dumourier, and we will wade again in Blood.——Now we are upon free discussions, I maintain that the diamonds and valuables seized at the Garde Meuble were never well accounted for. That was a mysterious affair! I have Spies and Emissaries at work, as well as Fœderates; I know what is going forward.——Come along with me, General, we will lay our heads together, and crush our enemies at a stroke.

Petion. Brethren, Citizens, Associates, for the love of common interest, and the vast project of aggrandizement on which we are embarked, have patience and temper. If we split, all is gone upon the instant---God knows what may happen---With all our unanimity and force concentrated, we can barely keep the people at large, who are now become a headstrong, lawless mob, quiet, and ward off universal pillage.——In this retired and select Meeting, I may venture to speak truth---We too well know the general misery of France, the scarcity of corn, dearth of

bread, want of fuel, reduction of wages, stoppage of labour, distress of the poor families, whose husbands have been worked up to the proper pitch of enthusiasm, and enticed to quit comfortable homes and trades to turn Soldiers, leaving their wives and families, naked and penniless, to starve ; the cries of orphans and widows perishing for want of clothes and sustenance ; the discontented and riotous spirit of the peasants, from having no means of employment, and beholding the lands they were accustomed to cultivate laid waste, and their Cots plundered by Soldiers ; the jealousy of Paris which obtains in the Provinces, and the hatred borne by the Parisians to the Provinces, because they fear the latter will keep back the small stock of provisions they have left, and that of course they must starve first.--- You are aware, that so licentious and abandoned is the character of the people now become, and so disused are they to work, that every attempt made to bring them back to their several occupations has failed, and that we despair of ever attaining that most essential point ; that if we had not every day, I may say every hour, contrivances of plots, alarms, conspiracies, and such like rumours, to occupy their attention, and fabricated or exaggerated accounts of victories to gratify their pride, all France would be in Tumult, the little order we have remaining destroyed, and the Leaders of the Convention perhaps the first victims, for not having given the Nation an equal division of lands, the promised *equality*, and the blessings they were taught to expect, and for which thousands upon thousands have bled.---It was but last night I had information of various Meetings, where Treason of every

kind against the new Constitution was daringly uttered ; yet we are afraid to notice it.---You know we have no Religion to keep the people in awe---no Law to govern and restrain them---no Credit---no Commerce---no Trade---no Manufacture---that the Country is drained of Wealth and Inhabitants---that we collect with extreme difficulty what Revenue we raise, and spend more than double what we collect---that if we had not happily seized upon the Domains of the Church, and driven out of the kingdom the Royalists, and all rich Individuals, whom we regarded as doubtful, or whose Treasures we wished to get at, and by subsequent wise decrees precluded the possibility of their return, so as to secure effectually the possession of their Lands and Property, we must long ago have blown up.——

Marat. Ay, that Seizure and Confiscation was my thought and Robertspiere's ; and my Marseillois did more good there than all the Decrees of the Convention.---Death is a surer way of disposing of the rich than banishment---Yet I was never sufficiently rewarded for that---We must have more of the same work. The cursed measure of the English, in keeping our people from corn, will undo us : and by the bye, I much wish our Constitutional Friends would again send us shoes and clothing. The Parisians all cry they will perish by the Sword rather than die of hunger, and the Provinces are in so deplorable a state themselves, that they will not transport corn, fuel, or provisions to Paris, else we might issue Assignats, and compel the taking them in payment. I see there must shortly be another massacre to please the people---That may appease them, till we see what Paine and Dumourier can

do with the English.---If we can but succeed there, we are made for ever ; we shall soon empty their Granaries, and send over their Corn to feed our own Subjects.---What enjoyment to destroy the Bank, carry off the Specie, pillage those wealthy Merchants, Tradesmen, and Mechanics, ship their Stores and Merchandise for France, and enrich ourselves—Eh, Paine!—But here comes Roland, with a bundle of papers in his hand.

Petion. He looks thoughtful and rather agitated. Great News I dare answer from the army.

Paine. I pledge myself, dispatches from England, and rare ones: The Country up, the Tower taken, all in Flames, our Friends sweeping every thing before them. Well, my good friend and fellow citizen, Roland, what is the news?

Roland. Mr. Paine, all is lost, we are ruined. You have deceived yourself, or betrayed us. Here are your vaunted English Insurrections, and perversion of the Old Constitution in favour of French Republicanism. Here your Tree of Liberty in St. George's Fields. Here the Cap of Liberty on every head.

Marat, Petion, Dumourier. For God's sake tell us the intelligence from England !

Roland. Intelligence! Why, the Militia is called out, a Fleet equipping, England firm to her good faith with the Dutch, and undaunted as usual; she fears us not; the eyes of the lower class of people are opened; their good sense has found out Tom Paine and French Pay; Government is vigorous in pursuit of our Spies and Emissaries; a reward offered for the apprehension of Frost; and what is worse

than all, one general ardent spirit of Loyalty and love for the Constitution has blazed forth, bearing down, in spite of the labour and expence we have been at, our Artifices, Wiles, Devices, Agents, and Friends, and nothing but Courage, Justice, and Vengeance, are breathed throughout the whole Island !

Our people are sunk into nothing, and dare not shew their faces. Some fled. All trembling least their treasonable proceedings should be discovered. The cypher of the dispatch was written under such confusion and in such haste, that it has cost me hours to make it out ; I always predicted this.

Petion. I too apprehended it. The English were too well convinced of the perfection and blessings of their Constitution, to be wrote or inveighed out of it with all our cunning and deep scheme. But what, in the name of God, is to be done !

Paine. The intelligence is false, I'll risk my life upon it. I'll hasten my Book ; give new instructions to my Emissaries—Fear nothing. I'll run to Frost.

Roland. One word, Mr. Paine. This is no time for writing—Look to yourself—Remember your pledge.

Paine, Well, but if all this should be so, we can but go to war at last, and beat them into our views. A War will instantly prevent their applying that damned surplus of Revenue to the reduction of the National Debt ; (which surplus, if my information be good, had this year got to an incredible height) and will also be attended

with other mischievous consequences to Great Britain. That will spread unpopularity and dissatisfaction.

Petion. But recollect, Mr. Paine, that the English people, are not so dull as to overlook that France is the cause of this. On us the odium and indignation will fall.

Paine. Well, I am off to Frost. We will lay our heads together, and bring you some grand expedient.

Marat. I suspect foul Play. Some of the Emissaries hired to go over from hence, have proved false, and represented to the English, the deplorable condition of the people here. I always wondered the artificers and mechanics were not seduced over.—After all, that fellow Paine may be a Knave. I'll away to Danton and Robertspierre. We must, I see, have a Massacre. We shall have bloody Riots. There must be Plunder.

Dumourier. I must post off to my Army, from which I got away privately to have a Conference, which has ended so differently from what we expected. My army, Roland and Petion, are in want of every thing; they have only been supported for some time by the pillage of the Countries we have invaded. I will immediately call a council of my confidential officers. The Convention must risk Holland. Nothing can keep the soldiers from Mutiny, or preserve the army, but the sacking of Amsterdam. Push that point in the Convention. We will arrange hereafter. Oh that I was at the head of my Troops in England. The Sea alone saves them. Adieu.

Roland. We must keep these Dispatches a profound secret as long as we are able. The danger

is urgent. We hate and despise Marat, and would not have condescended to have admitted him to the Meeting, but that it was necessary to settle old Scores, and for other special Reasons. Yet what he threw out, particularly about Paine, deserves Consideration. The People will be furious and frantic when they find England united against France. The Conquest of England has been the lure to them lately. But we must lose no time. I will hasten to our trusty friend,———, who is always firm, and a sound adviser in emergencies. Have an eye on Marat, Petion—I will go home and consult what language we shall hold to the Convention, and prepare two or three friends accordingly. Turn over Paine in your mind. We will meet at ——, before we go to the Convention.

The first of these is the fact that the
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